

HEPATITIS A VACCINE

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

1 What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). HAV is found in the stool of persons with hepatitis A. It is usually spread by close personal contact and sometimes by eating food or drinking water containing HAV.

Hepatitis A can cause:

- mild “flu-like” illness
- jaundice (yellow skin or eyes)
- severe stomach pains and diarrhea

People with hepatitis A infection often have to be hospitalized. In rare cases, hepatitis A causes death.



A person who has hepatitis A can easily pass the disease to others within the same household.

Hepatitis A vaccine can prevent hepatitis A.

2 Who should get hepatitis A vaccine and when?

- Persons 2 years of age and older traveling or working in countries with high rates of hepatitis A, such as those located in Central or South America, the Caribbean, Mexico, Asia (except Japan), Africa, and southern or eastern Europe. *The vaccine series should be started at least one month before traveling.*
- Persons who live in communities that have prolonged outbreaks of hepatitis A.

- Persons who live in communities with high rates of hepatitis A: for example, American Indian, Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander communities and some religious communities.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Persons who use street drugs.
- Persons with chronic liver disease.
- Persons who receive clotting factor concentrates.

Two doses of the vaccine, given at least 6 months apart, are needed for lasting protection.

Hepatitis A vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines.



3 Some people should not get hepatitis A vaccine or should wait

People who have ever had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of hepatitis A vaccine should not get another dose.

People who are mildly ill at the time the shot is scheduled should get hepatitis A vaccine. People with moderate or severe illnesses should usually wait until they recover. Your doctor or nurse can advise you.

The safety of hepatitis A vaccine for pregnant women is not yet known. But any risk to either the pregnant woman or the fetus is thought to be very low.

Ask your doctor or nurse for details.

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What are the risks from hepatitis A vaccine?

A vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of hepatitis A vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small.

Getting hepatitis A vaccine is much safer than getting the disease.

Mild problems

- soreness where the shot was given (*about 1 out of 2 adults, and up to 1 out of 5 children*)
- headache (*about 1 out of 6 adults and 1 out of 20 children*)
- loss of appetite (*about 1 out of 12 children*)
- tiredness (*about 1 out of 14 adults*)

If these problems occur, they usually come 3-5 days after vaccination and last for 1 or 2 days.

Severe problems

- serious allergic reaction, within a few minutes to a few hours of the shot (*very rare*).

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What if there is a moderate or severe reaction?

What should I look for?

Any unusual condition, such as a high fever or behavior changes. Signs of a serious allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat, or dizziness.

What should I do?

- Call a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.

- Ask your doctor, nurse, or health department to file a Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) form. Or call VAERS yourself at **1-800-822-7967** or visit their website at <http://www.vaers.org>.

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How can I learn more?

- Ask your doctor or nurse. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
 - Call **1-800-232-2522** (English)
 - Call **1-800-232-0233** (Español)
 - Visit the National Immunization Program's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/nip>, or CDC's hepatitis website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/hepatitis.htm>

IMMUNE GLOBULIN (IG)

Immune globulin can provide *temporary* immunity to hepatitis A.

Who should get IG?

- Persons who have been exposed to HAV and can get IG within 2 weeks of that exposure.
- Travelers to areas with high rates of hepatitis A, if they do not receive hepatitis A vaccine.

When should IG be given?

It can be given before exposure to HAV or within 2 weeks after exposure

Benefits

IG protects against HAV for 3-5 months, depending on dosage.

Risks

Rare: swelling, hives, or allergic reaction.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Immunization Program